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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000666

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SUBJECT: CHAD: ERDIMI BLAMES STALLED TALKS ON CHAD, LIBYA  
(C-AL8-00761)

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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11. (C) RFC leader Timan Erdimi says that the talks in Tripoli between his movement and Chadian representatives have stalled because of Deby's lack of sincerity to participate in real political dialogue and Libya's pro-Deby bias. Though some RFC representatives remain in Libya to signify Erdimi's preference for negotiations over war, a military solution may be the only option if Deby's government refuses serious negotiations. The National Alliance (AN), though delayed in mounting a new offensive due to "logistical problems," remains poised to launch another coup attempt and was excluded from the Tripoli talks by the Libyan authorities. Erdimi claims that the RFC and the AN have overcome the ethnic divisions that plagued them during the February coup attempt and that while the views of AN leaders on a post-Deby political structure differ from his own, powerful military elements in the AN share his vision for a transitional government. End summary.

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Libya Talks Stalled  
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12. (C) Rally of Forces for Change (RFC) President Timan Erdimi told PolCouns and Poloff on April 30 in Khartoum that the negotiations in Tripoli between his movement and the Chadian government have stalled, blaming both President Deby's regime and the Libya government for the break-down in dialogue. Chadian negotiators have demonstrated neither a willingness to engage in substantive talks nor real flexibility in discussing power-sharing issues, preferring to buy time using false pretenses. Libyan authorities continue to back Deby "and only Deby," said Erdimi, and to exclude representatives from the National Alliance (AN) from participating. (Note: In discussions with Poloff, AN leaders have also claimed that Libya did not invite them to the negotiations. End note.) For these reasons, Erdimi returned in frustration to Khartoum in mid-April. He admitted, however, that the Chadian rebels are "caught" because of

Libya's negative role: Constructive dialogue cannot occur in the current venue, but if the talks are moved and held under more neutral auspices, the "Libyans will cause trouble."

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Prefers Dialogue but War May Be Only Option  
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13. (C) Sudan expressed initial support for the Tripoli talks, claimed Erdimi, but has since pushed him to withdraw his negotiators because of the lack of progress. He has resisted this pressure, however, to demonstrate his preference for political dialogue over war, which he said would be "catastrophic." Reporting that his forces remained centered in Borak, Chad, Erdimi said that as long as the RFC is at least formally engaged in negotiations it will not attack Deby's government. Nonetheless, a military solution may be the Chadian rebels' only option if Deby's government refuses serious talks, predicting that the rainy season (which would prevent a new rebel offensive) will not begin until July. "If the U.S. doesn't want Idriss' regime changed by force, the only solution is dialogue," said Erdimi, who urged the USG to press Deby's government to negotiate in earnest.

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Sudan, AN Free to Pursue Regime Change  
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14. (C) Since Libya did not invite AN representatives to Tripoli--and dislikes Front du Salut de la Republique (FSR) leader Ahmed Soubian--the Sudanese Government "is free" to pursue regime change in N'djamena through the AN. The allied forces of the FSR, Mahamat Nouri's Union des Forces du Developpement et de la Democratie (UFDD), and Abdelwahid Aboud's UFDD/Fondamentale remain near Ade and have delayed an offensive due only to "logistical difficulties." Downplaying any tribal tensions between his Zaghawa movement and the AN,

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Erdimi said that "even now, we prefer that others participate" in negotiations. He blamed the friction between RFC and AN fighters during the February offensive in N'djamena on "those without a national perspective," implying that the Chadian rebels have since overcome these differences.

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New Chadian Government "Changes Nothing"  
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15. (C) Erdimi stated that the appointment of a new Chadian government "changes nothing," claiming that even those ministers drawn from the political opposition are "Deby's people." Internal Chadian tensions resulted from Deby's mistreatment of the Arab population and "political-military problems", he explained. "Idriss insulted the Arabs, who represent 20 to 25 percent of the population," said Erdimi. "You cannot have elections or democracy without them, and Deby is the great handicap to ending the ethnic problems." If Deby either accepts a credible power-sharing arrangement or is forced from office, a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program for the rebels could contribute to building a multi-ethnic national military. He claimed that the rebel groups are willing to participate in such a program.

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RFC, AN Positions Differ  
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16. (C) The positions of the RFC and the AN leaders on a post-Deby political strategy differ in the timing for a transition to full democracy, however. Erdimi portrayed the AN plan for a "National Forum" that prepares the country for elections after six-months as unrealistic. Instead, he believes that the national forum of rebel movements, political opposition leaders, and civic activists could

legitimize an interim administration that assures security and governs during a two to three-year "transitional period."

The interim administration would focus on building Chad's governing institutions, attracting international support, and executing a DDR program. Criticizing Nouri, Soubian, and Abdelwahid for not appreciating the amount of organization and funding necessary for elections, Erdimi claimed that influential field elements within the AN agreed with his approach, mentioning UFDD's Adiman Hasballah, who he said commands 3,000 of Nouri's fighters.

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Comment  
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17. (C) Though Sudan has provided Erdimi with a large and well-appointed house in an upscale Khartoum neighborhood (that is much nicer than the small apartment he occupied before he left for Tripoli), he offered no indication that the Sudanese authorities are restricting his movements. He demurred when asked whether the GOS is pressing him to delay or initiate a renewed offensive against Ndjamen. Despite his pro-Arab rhetoric, Erdimi disparages Nouri and Soubian's abilities. He believes that, among the main rebel leaders, only he is qualified to govern Chad. In a power-sharing arrangement that keeps Deby as President, Erdimi will continue to demand the post of Prime Minister; if Deby falls from power, Erdimi will aspire to replace him. His argument, however, that inter-ethnic tension among the rebels have decreased and that a DDR program is easily made operational are unconvincing when confronted with the likely chaos that would plague Chad in the event of Deby's sudden collapse. The one exception is if France, through back channel discussions with the rebels, takes responsibility for stabilizing the country after Deby's departure, though Erdimi denies he has had any contact with French officials. Whichever option is pursued, the looming rainy season means that it could be a long hot summer in Chad before the rains stop the "fighting season." End comment.

18. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.  
FERNANDEZ